

**SCOPING STATEMENT
PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
FOR THE MONTANA DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE
NOXIOUS WEED TRUST FUND GRANT PROGRAM
JANUARY 13, 2009**

I. DESCRIPTION OF PROGRAM

The Montana Department of Agriculture (MDA) coordinates the Noxious Weed Trust Fund (NWTF) under provisions of the Montana Noxious Weed Trust Fund Act of 1985 (80-7-8, Montana Code Annotated). The MDA administers funds generated from interest on the permanent noxious weed management trust fund, ongoing revenues from a 1.5% fee on motor vehicle registration, general fund, and Cooperative Forestry Assistance and other federal funding. Revenue is distributed through cost-share grants or contract funds to communities, weed districts, universities, or other entities it considers appropriate for noxious weed research, education, and local cooperative projects.

The MDA distributes approximately \$2,500,000 per year in grants which typically fund about 95 special projects (local cooperative projects, research, and education) in addition to 63 county and reservation grants. Since 1985, 2,613 grant projects have been funded. The projects include 1,167 local cooperative, 238 research, 296 education, and 912 special county/reservation grants. The NWTF grants program is competitive and applications are submitted to the MDA once per year (generally in December). Grant funding recommendations are made by an eleven member Noxious Weed Advisory Council appointed by the Director of the MDA.

The MDA completed a PEIS for the NWTF grants program in 1992 and has administered the environmental reviews of subsequent grant projects under guidelines developed by that document. The MDA has determined that changes in the grants program since 1992 (e.g., new herbicides available for weed management and newly invading noxious weeds including aquatic species) constitute a major state action which requires preparation of another PEIS as dictated by the Montana Environmental Policy Act (MEPA) (75-1-101, MCA) and rules (4.2.312-337 Administrative Rules of Montana (ARM)). The MDA has contracted with Tetra Tech for preparation of the PEIS.

II. CONTENT OF THE PEIS

The MDA prepared this scoping document to inform the public of the proposed PEIS and to seek additional public input. The MDA is aware of a number of issues and concerns that are listed below. The MDA encourages public participation in the preparation of the PEIS and requests public input on those issues outlined in Section III, as well as any other issues the public may have with the program. Public input will help the department focus on the significant

issues and concerns related to the NWTF grants program and to select alternatives for analysis by the PEIS.

Alternatives that may be considered in the PEIS include the following:

- Continuation of the grants program as it is currently administered;
- Modification of the grants program to streamline grant application and reporting process to improve efficiencies and compliance with environmental requirements;
- Modification of the grants program to require additional information from grant applicants prior to their acceptance and/or after funding to improve efficiencies and compliance with environmental requirements.

The Final PEIS will establish the future direction of the NWTF grants program.

III ISSUES TO BE DISCUSSED

The following issues and concerns have been identified by MDA through agency discussions and may be used as a general guideline for discussion at the scoping sessions. The MDA encourages submission by the public of additional issues pertaining to the grants program for consideration.

1. What are direct, indirect and cumulative impacts of the possible actions funded by the NWTF grant program?
2. Does the environmental review process for grant projects funded by the NWTF adequately identify and evaluate potential impacts of the projects, particularly related to new herbicides introduced since the 1992 PEIS?
3. Does the environmental review process for grant projects funded by the NWTF adequately identify and evaluate potential impacts associated with grant projects that treat aquatic weeds?
4. What criteria should the MDA use to determine whether a grant proposal requires no environmental review under MEPA (e.g., non-herbicide treatments and education grants) or a more detailed review (e.g., aquatic treatments)?
5. Do existing post-grant reporting criteria adequately identify the project that was implemented and evaluate grantees compliance with environmental requirements?
6. Do existing reporting criteria need to be modified to more accurately reflect activities within various types of projects including local cooperative, research, and education grants?

IV TIMING OF COMMENTS

Written comments concerning this PEIS should be submitted to the department no later than March 2, 2009. Direct comments to:

Mr. Dave Burch
 Montana Department of Agriculture
 State Weed Coordinator
 PO Box 200201
 Helena, MT 59620

V PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Copies of this scoping document will be mailed or emailed to individuals, agencies and organizations on MDA's NWTF mailing list. The MDA will hold thirteen public meetings. The purpose of these meetings is to help determine the scope of the PEIS and to identify issues to be addressed by the PEIS. Verbal public comments at the meetings may be limited to ensure an opportunity for everyone to participate in the meetings. Individuals providing verbal comments are requested to provide a copy of their comments for the record. Written comments will be accepted by MDA through March 2, 2009.

Public meetings will be held in the following locations at the listed dates and times:

DATE	CITY	LOCATION/ADDRESS	TIME
Monday February 2nd	Kalispell	Earl Bennett Bldg. 1035 1st Ave West	2:00 pm to 4:00 pm
Tuesday Feb. 3rd	Missoula	Missoula County Extension/Weed Office, 2825 Santa Fe Ct.	9:00 am to 11:00 am
Tuesday Feb. 3rd	Ovando	Ovando Fire Hall	1:30 pm to 2:30 pm
Wednesday Feb. 4th	Butte	Holiday Inn Express Parkside, 1 Holiday Park Drive	4:30 pm to 6:30 pm
Thursday Feb. 5th	Avon	Avon Community Center	1:30 pm to 2:30 pm
Tuesday February 10th	Bozeman	GranTree Inn, 1325 North 7th Ave.	4:30 pm to 6:00 pm
Wednesday Feb. 11th	Big Timber	Big Timber Carnegie Library, 314 McLeod St.	9:00 am to 10:30 am
Wednesday Feb. 11th	Billings	Hampton Inn, 5110 Southgate Drive	1:30 pm to 3:00 pm
Wednesday Feb. 11th	Miles City	Custer County Courthouse, Conference Room, 1010 Main	7:00 pm to 8:30 pm
Thursday Feb. 12th	Glendive	Dawson County Courthouse Community Room, 207 West Bell St.	9:00 am to 10:30 am
Thursday Feb. 12th	Glasgow	Elks Club, 309 2nd Ave. South	3:30 pm to 5:00 pm
Friday Feb. 13th	Havre	Justice Center, 1250 2nd Street West	9:00 am to 10:30 am
Friday Feb. 13th	Great Falls	Cascade County Weed & Mosquito Office, 521 1st Ave. NW	2:30 pm to 4 pm

The meetings will be held to share information and receive comments related to the environmental impacts of MDA's NWTF grant program. A representative from MDA will provide a brief description of the NWTF grants program. There will also be a presentation on the EIS process. After the presentations, attendees will have an opportunity to speak with MDA technical staff with expertise in various disciplines and to submit written comments. The MDA will make reasonable accommodations for persons with disabilities who wish to participate in one of the meetings or who need an alternative accessible format of this notice. If you require an accommodation, please contact, David Burch of MDA at (406) 444-3140.